

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9543
INFO AMEMBASSY COTONOU IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CONAKRY IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
AMEMBASSY LAGOS
AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LOME
AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION GENEVA

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 3759

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, OAU, GB, DM
SUBJECT: BENIN SITUATION: OAU ACTIVITIES

REF: LIBREVILLE 2237

SUMMARY. OAU ACTING SECGEN, DR. PETER ONU, PROVIDES A RUNDOWN ON THE BACKGROUND TO THE GABON-BENIN DISPUTE AND HIS OWN EFFORTS TO MEDIATE. A MINISTERIAL-LEVEL MEETING BETWEEN GABON AND BENIN IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN CONAKRY ON AUG 28. ONU BELIVES PROSPECTS ARE GOOD FOR AN AFRICAN-TYPE SOLUTION TO THE ISSUE, WHICH WILL NOT RESULT IN UNDUE HARSHIP TO BENINESE REFUGEES IN GABON. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING THE AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON OAU ACTING SECGEN PETER ONU, AUG 24, ONU GAVE US THE FOLLOWING RUNDOWN ON HIS
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EFFORTS TO HELP RESOLVE THE GABON-BENIN DISPUTE. HE IS THE OAU OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE FOR MEDIATING BETWEEN THE PARTIES.

2. ONU REVIEWED HISOTRY OF THE DISPUTE BEGINNING WITH JAN 1977 MERCENARY INVASION OF BENIN. HE NOTED THAT BOTH THE OAU AND UN INVESTIGATION REPORTS OF THOSE EVENTS HAD ACCUSED MOROCCO OF PROVIDING TRAINING FOR THE INVADERS AND GABON OF PERMITTING

USE OF ITS TERRITORY FOR STAGING THE ACTUAL ATTACKS ON BENIN. ONU SAID THAT UNFORTUNATELY BENIN PRESIDENT KEREKOU HAD PUBLICLY EMBARRASSED GABON PRESIDENT BONGO AT THE JULY 1978 KHARTOUM OAU SUMMIT BY INVOLVING THESE REPORTS ON A REGRETTABLE EVENT WHICH HAD BEEN RECEDING INTO HISTORY. ACCORDING TO ONU, LIVE TV COVERAGE OF THE KHARTOUM MEETING IN GABON RESULTED IN A SPONTANEOUS CHAUVINIST REACTION AGAINST BENINESE THERE, INCLUDING PERHAPS TWO KILLINGS PRIOR TO BONGO'S RETURN TO LIBREVILLE.

2. ONU SAID THAT BONGO'S INITIAL REACTION TO HIS EMBARRASSMENT WAS RAGE AND A HASTY DECISION TO EXPEL ALL BENINESE LIVING IN GABON. ONU SAID THAT HIS EFFORTS SO FAR HAD BEEN DIRECTED TOWARDS GETTING THE TWO PARTIES TO TALK TO EACH OTHER. HE SAID THAT HE FIRST TOLD BONGO THAT GABON COULD NOT EXPEL ALL BENINESE LIVING IN GABON BECAUSE MANY WERE POLITICAL REFUGEES FROM BENIN, AND, UNDER THE AFRICAN CONVENTION ON REFUGEES, COULD NOT BE EXPELLED TO THE COUNTRY THEY HAD ORIGINALLY FLED. ONU SAID BONGO ACCEPTED HIS PRESENTATION ON GABON'S RESPONSIBILITIES. ONU IMPLIED THAT KEREKOU HAD BEEN MORE THAN WILLING TO ACCEPT ALL BENINESE BACK, ESPECIALLY POLITICAL REFUGEES FROM HIS REGIME.

3. ONU'S NEXT STEP WAS TO ARRANGE A MINISTERIAL-LEVEL MEETING BETWEEN GABON AND BENIN. THIS HAS BEEN NOW SCHEDULED FOR AUG 28 IN CONAKRY. ONU SELECTED THIS SITE BECAUSE OF GUINEA'S
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PRIOR ROLE IN TRYING TO MEDIATE THE DISPUTE. HE IS GENERALLY OPTIMISTIC THAT AN AFRICAN SOLUTION WILL BE FOUND, PRESUMABLY MEANING THAT AFTER FACE-TO-FACE TALKS BETWEEN THE PARTIES INVOLVED, BOTH SIDES WILL DRAW BACK SOMEWHAT AND THE ISSUE WILL GRADUALLY DISAPPEAR FROM VIEW PERMANENTLY.

4. WITH REGARD TO THE BENINESE IN GABON, ONU THOUGHT THAT THEY WOULD CONTINUE TO LEAVE. SOME WOULD VOLUNTARILY RETURN TO BENIN ON A GENERALLY ORDERLY AND PHASED BASIS WHICH CAN BE WORKED OUT BETWEEN GABON AND BENIN DIRECTLY. ANTI-KEREKOU REFUGEES WILL NOT BE FORCED TO RETURN TO BENIN, BUT WILL SEEK OTHER, MORE HOSPITABLE COUNTEIS TO REFUGE.

5. ONU DEPARTS ADDIS ABABA AUG 25 FOR LIBREVILLE AND CONTONOU TO HOLD LAST MINUTE TALKS WITH BONGO AND KEREKOU PRIOR TO ARRIVING IN CONAKRY FOR THE TALKS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN AUG 28.
CHAPIN

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